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'Russian Roulette' author warns: 'We're talking about survival'

By Tom Nugent

After more than 20 years of studying both the Soviet Union and the dangers of nuclear warfare, he has become convinced that the human race now stands at the crossroads of survival.

Very soon, he predicts, we shall all be required to make a choice between life and death.

"We are at the most dangerous point in our history," warned former State Department and CIA analyst Arthur Macy Cox during a recent "citizens briefing" at Baltimore's downtown Catholic Center. "And it is growing more dangerous every day. . . This is the kind of absolute peril we're moving toward—where technology is outstripping the ability of man to control what happens on Earth.

"I say that we cannot allow it [nuclear war] to be done; we must reject the concept of first-strike [weapons]."

Mr. Cox's remarks, delivered to an audience of more than a hundred priests, nuns, ministers and lay people who attended an Interfaith Coalition breakfast seminar on the arms race, were designed to remind citizens about the overwhelming importance, right now, of what the Soviet expert described as "doing your homework."

More than anything else, the nuclear weapons analyst wanted his listeners to understand that their lives were—at that very moment, and for the indefinite future—in serious jeopardy.

"We're talking about survival," warned Mr. Cox, who was the third speaker in the Coalition's series of anti-war briefings, "and I have never been aware of a more dangerous time, and what will become an even more dangerous time in the next two or three years—unless we turn it around."

According to Mr. Cox, who has served as an American architect of several international peace treaties and also as a negotiator at the ongoing SALT talks on nuclear disarmament, the present weapons crisis developed out of several complicated factors.

As outlined in his recent book, "Russian Roulette: The Superpower Game" (New York Times Books, \$14.95), the life-or-death scenario in which we now find ourselves inextricably caught took shape as follows:

- After responding rather warmly to the diplomatic advances of West Germany's Willy Brandt in the early 1970s and to the Nixon-Kissinger "Moscow Summit" of 1972, the Soviet Union committed a "gigantic blunder" by pursuing a course of military aggression in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan in more recent years. The result, according to Mr. Cox, was to "shift the whole pace of detente back by years"—and also to allow the opponents of detente to "seize on this as a case of worldwide aggression."

- After getting themselves elected, at least in part on the strength of their hawkish stance toward the Soviets, the Reagan conservatives escalated the risks of nuclear war enormously by making a key shift in emphasis—the shift from using nuclear weapons as the "ultimate defense" to using them as a "first strike," offensive weapon.

"These people are on a course," the veteran CIA analyst said, "which in my opinion is so dangerous that unless it is reversed, the probability of nuclear accident becomes extreme."

- In spite of several recent nuclear "accidents" (including crashed airplanes carrying nuclear devices, nuclear submarines which lost contact with their command systems, and at least three cases in which malfunctioning computers mistakenly announced that the Soviets had launched a nuclear strike), the Reagan defense department is proceeding with plans to install super-quick Pershing II missiles into Western Europe by 1984.

According to Mr. Cox, these missiles (along with several other lethal weapons, such as the controversial MX Missile) are part of a new military strategy described by Defense

Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger in a top-secret memo which was leaked to the press last spring.

"Weinberger signed a five-year plan for Defense," said Mr. Cox, "which calls for the capacity for 'decapitating the Soviet state.' And this memo has been acknowledged by Weinberger, and by other officials.

"To decapitate means that we intend to have first-strike weapons. Weapons so accurate, powerful, swift, that they can eliminate the entire Soviet leadership and communications system in one attack. That is the course we are presently on."

But that course carries enormous risks—for Americans, as well as for Russians—according to Mr. Cox.

The Germany-based Pershing II missiles, for example, would be able to reach their Soviet targets within six minutes.

And this means that the Soviets would have less than six minutes in which to decide whether to respond to warnings of an attack. "In my opinion, such a course is totally irrational," said Mr. Cox. "It is dangerous because, obviously, the Soviet Union is going to protect itself by building first-strike weapons of its own.

"And when you have systems that will attack in six minutes, no human system can possibly respond. Can you imagine the Politburo assembling to make a six-minute decision about [a nuclear war]? No . . . they will be forced into a corner, to a point where they will have to launch on warning. And that means—you don't wait to find out if it's real or not.

"You launch."

Mr. Cox, who worked as a negotiator on the Trieste Settlement and the Korean War ceasefire (among other international agreements), and then labored for 10 years as a CIA analyst before leaving government service in 1977 to become a consultant on international relations, believes that the "absolute peril" of our present situation requires immediate U.S.-Soviet negotiations to eliminate the deployment of first-strike weapons.

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